

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4869

INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

CINCPAC HONOLULU

CONFIDENTIAL DACCA 2969

CORRECTED COPY (TEXT)

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BG

SUBJ: ZIA'S VICTORY

REF: DACCA 2910

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT ZIA HAS SECURED AN ALMOST 99 PERCENT FAVORABLE VOTE IN HIS MAY 30 REFERENDUM, BASED ON A SURPRISING 87 PERCENT VOTER PARTICIPATION. IN HIS FIRST PRESS CONFERENCE AFTER THE REFERENDUM RESULTS WERE KNOWN, ZIA PROMISED THAT GENERAL ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD AS SCHEDULED. HE REFUSED, HOWEVER, TO SPECULATE ON HIS FUTURE AS A POSSIBLE POLITICIAN. HIS SUCCESS IN THE REFERENDUM IS PARTLY DUE TO HIS POLITICAL SHREWDNESS AND PARTLY TO HIS GOOD LUCK WITH THE FOOD SUPPLY SITUATION IN THE LAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS. NOW HIS PROBLEM WILL BE MAINTAINING HIS POPULARITY WITH THE PEOPLE WHILE REASSURING HIS COLLEAGUES AND SUPPORTERS IN THE ARMY THAT HE IS NOT RISING TOO HIGH. END SUMMARY.

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2. WITH MOST OF THE RETURNS IN EXCEPT FOR A FEW POLLING STATIONS IN RURAL SYLHET AND THE CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS, IT HAS BECOME CLEAR THAT PRESIDENT ZIA HAS SCORED AN IMPRESSIVE VICTORY INDEED. THE UNOFFICIAL "YES" VOTE STANDS AT OVER 33 MILLION WITH THE "NO" VOTE LESS THAN FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND. THE FAVORABLE VOTE IS THEREFORE CLOSE TO 99 PERCENT. OF PERHAPS EQUAL SIGNIFICANCE AND EVEN MORE

SURPRISING ARE THE FIGURES FOR VOTER TURNOUT, WHICH ARE BEING PLACED AROUND 87 TO 88 PERCENT PARTICIPATION. WE HAVE NO IMMEDIATE REASON TO CHALLENGE THE HIGH PERCENTAGE OF VOTER TURNOUT, ALTHOUGH SUCH FIGURES DWARF THE 57 PERCENT TURNOUT IN 1970, A CRUCIAL ELECTION, AND THE 36 PERCENT FOR THE FIRST PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN 1973. THERE SEEMS NO DOUBT THAT ZIA'S POPULARITY IS GREATEST IN THE RURAL AREAS, WHERE HE SPENT MOST OF HIS TIME CAMPAIGNING. AS WAS MENTIONED EARLIER (REFTEL), ZIA NEVER DUD CALL A MASS RALLY NOR DO ANY CAMPAIGNING IN DACCA, AND THE VOTER TURNOUT HERE, 70 PERCENT, PERHAPS REFLECTS HIS INATTENTION.

3. ON TUESDAY AFTERNOON, MAY 31, ZIA HELD HIS FIRST PJESS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING THE REFERENDUM. HE SAID THE RESULTS MADE HIM FEEL "GREAT" AND HE ADMITTED THAT HE HAD NOT EXPECTED SUCH A HUGE VOTER PARTICIPATION. ZIA FIELDDED THE PRESS QUESTIONS IN THE MANNER OF AN EXPERIENCED POLITICIAN, REFUSING TO BE SPECIFIC ON HIS FUTURE PLANS EXCEPT TO REASSURE HIS QUESTIONERS THAT THE ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY WOULD BE TURNED TO IMPLEMENT HIS 19-POINT PROGRAM AND THAT THE 1978 GENERAL ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD ON SCHEDULE. HE REFUSED TO SPECULATE WHETHER HE WOULD BE A CANDIDATE IN THOSE ELECTIONS. TO THE QUESTIONS OF WHETHER HIS GOVERNMENT COULD STILL BE TERMED A NON-PARTISAN, INTERIM AND NON-POLITICAL ONE AND WHETHER HE WOULD INCLUDE SOME POLITICAL FIGURES IN HIS COUNCIL OF ADVISORS, HE REPLIED, "WANT AND SEE." WHEN ASKED WHETHER BANGLADESH WOULD BECOME OFFICIALLY AN ISLAMIC REPUBLIC, ZIA ANSWERED THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO SEEK THE OPINION OF THE PEOPLE.
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4. POLITICIANS ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM HAVE HAILED THE VICTORY, CALLING THE VOTING PEACEFUL, IMPARTIAL AND FAIR. ATAUR RAHMAN FAAN, THE PRESIDENT OF THE JATIYO LEAGUE AND THE MAN WHO RUMOR HAS IT MAY ASSUME THE VICE PRESIDENCY OR OTHER VISIBLE BUT LARGELY SYMBOLIC POSITION IN ZIA'S GOVERNMENT, EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT WITH HIS MANDATE, ZIA WOULD BE ABLE TO FULFILL HIS COMMITMENTS. ONE OF THE MORE COLORFUL ENDORSEMENTS CAME FROM A. AWAL, THE CHIEF OF THE LEGAL FACTION OF THE JATIYA SAMAJTANTRIK DAL (JSD), WHO SAID: "I HEARTILY CONGRATULATE PRESIDENT ZIA AND THE PEOPLE FOR THEIR UNIQUE COMPACT THROUGH THE REFERENDUM, PROVING ONCE AGAIN THAT ALL POWER BELONG(S) TO THE PEOPLE IN THEIR AWFUL MAJESTY." AWAMI LEAGUE AND DEMOCRATIC LEAGUE SPOKESMEN HAVE MADE NO PUBLIC STATEMENTS.

5. COMMENT: ZIA'S MASSIVE SUPPORT IS A REFLECTION OF HIS IMAGE AS AN HONEST AND MODEST SOLDIER-STATESMAN. IT IS ALSO THE RESULT OF SEVERAL SHREWD POLITICAL MOVES

ON HIS PART. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT HIS DECISION TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION IN FAVOR OF THE ISLAMIC RELIGION TOUCHED A RESPONSIVE CHORD AMONG THE MASSES AND THE INTELLECTUALS. BY OUTLINING A COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT POLICY, ZIA HAS AWISO FOR THE TIME BEING OUTMANEUVERED THE VMLITICIANS, WHO HAVE SPENT THEIR DAYS BICKERING OVER PARTY TACTICS OR CLINGING TO OLD LEADERS WITH DISCREDITED SLOGANS.

6. THE REFERENDUM GIVES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY TO ZIA, WHO NOW PERSONALLY MUST ANSWER FOR ADMINISTRATIVE DELAYS AND FRUSTRATIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS. ZIA ALSO HAS BEEN EXTRAORDINARILY LUCKY WITH THE FOOD SITUATION AND THE WEATHER DURING HIS EIGHTEEN-MONTH RULE. AS A RESULT, THE REFERENDUM HAS CAUGHT HIM AT THE CREST OF HIS POPULARITY AND, AS SOME OBSERVERS ARE POINTING OUT, HE HAS NOWHERE TO GO FROM HERE BUT DOWN.

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7. DESPITE THE PEOPLE'S VOTE, ZIA'S POLITICAL BASE REMAINS IN THE ARMY. IT WILL BE IMPORTANT TO OBSERVE WHETHER ZIA WILL MODIFY OR DROP HIS CAREFULLY NURTURED IMAGE AS THE HUMBLE SOLDIER TRYING TO SERVE HIS COUNTRY. A MORE PRESIDENTIAL, OR POLITICAL, IMAGE MAY ANTAGONIZE SOME SECTIONS WITHIN THE ARMY. ZIA HAS BEEN FULLY AWARE OF HIS NEED TO MAINTAIN PROPER RELATIONS WITH HIS ARMY COLLEAGUES, BUT THIS OUTPOURING OF POPULAR SUPPORT IN THE REFERENDUM COULD BE RATHER HEADY. HOW ZIA REACTS PERSONALLY TO THIS REFERENDUM VICTORY COULD DETERMINE WHETHER HE WILL BE ABLE TO IMPLEMENT HIS DEVELOPMENT PLANS. MASTERS

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